

# On Nietzsche's Concept of 'European Nihilism'

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In Nietzsche, 'European nihilism' has at its core valuelessness, meaninglessness and senselessness. This article argues that Nietzsche is not replacing God with the nothing, but rather that he regards 'European nihilism' as an 'in-between state' that is necessary for getting beyond Christian morality. An important characteristic of a Nietzschean philosopher is his 'will to responsibility'. One of his responsibilities consists of the creation of the values and the concepts that are needed in order to overcome the intermediate state of nihilism. For prevailing over nihilism in science, Nietzsche suggests drawing on philosophy for the creation of values and drawing on art in order to create beautiful surfaces that are based on these values. He regards science as a cultural system that rests on contingent grounds. Therefore, his work is concerned with the responsible construction of the narratives of science in such a way that they enhance agency and promote a life-affirming future.

## Introduction

The aim of this article is to explore Nietzsche's concept of 'European nihilism' as he developed it in both his published and in his unpublished writings. Thereby, I shall focus on the origin and the features of European nihilism and its forms (incomplete, complete, passive, active, radical and extreme nihilism). I will also discuss pity as the practice of nihilism. Further, I shall argue that nihilism in Nietzsche is an intermediate state. The article concludes with some considerations on the responsibility in Nietzsche to transform both the self and culture. There are remarks about nihilism dispersed throughout Nietzsche's published books. A more concentrated treatment of nihilism we find in his late unpublished notes from 1886 onwards. In 1873 the early Nietzsche read Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* (1862). This novel is the main source of his concept of nihilism.

European Nihilism in Nietzsche is an under-researched topic despite its doubtlessly considerable relevance for his thoughts. Indeed, in *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* (2009), Bernard Reginster argues that Nietzsche

was mainly concerned with getting beyond nihilism. He explicitly states that 'nihilism is the central problem of Nietzsche's philosophy'.<sup>1</sup> For Reginster, in order to overcome the disorientation and despair brought about by nihilism, life needs to be affirmed, inclusive of its inescapable suffering. He writes that 'the affirmation of life results from a revaluation of the nihilist's life-negating values' (Ref. 1, p. 266). He identifies perspectivism as Nietzsche's means to cope with the loss of orientation. He also correctly says that Nietzsche regards the existence of resistances to our will (suffering) as necessary for man's improvement (Ref. 1, p. 267).

Unlike Reginster, I think that the overman is Nietzsche's principal concern in his opus and not nihilism, albeit I also regard nihilism as one of Nietzsche's key issues (in addition to 'perspectivism', the 'will to power' and the 'eternal return of the same'). Yet I endorse Keith Ansell-Pearson's acute observation in *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker: The Perfect Nihilist* (1994) that 'Nietzsche's analysis of the phenomenon of nihilism is important because it shows that the roots of the spiritual and ethico-political crises of the West lie deep within its historical and philosophical culture'.<sup>2</sup> In *Nihilism* (2009) the sociologist Bülent Dikens provides a systematic overview of the notion. He convincingly claims that 'most significant problems of contemporary life have their origins in nihilism and its paradoxical logic, which is simultaneously destructive to and constitutive of society'.<sup>3</sup> He also indicates some possibilities of overcoming nihilism by invoking concepts such as 'event', 'agonism' and 'antagonism'. Jeffrey Metzger's edited volume *Nietzsche, Nihilism and the Philosophy of the Future* (2009) collects insightful contemporary interpretations of Nietzsche's nihilism.<sup>4</sup>

Martin Heidegger's lectures from 1940 treat in a sustained manner European nihilism in Nietzsche.<sup>5</sup> He defines it as an epoch in which 'Nothing befalls Being itself'. He claims that 'nihilism, thought in its essence, is [...] the fundamental movement of the history of the West'.<sup>6</sup> In *Heidegger und Nietzsche* (2000), Wolfgang Müller-Lauter explains that Heidegger suggests that Nietzsche perfected nihilism rather than overcame it, since, according to Heidegger, there is the 'forgetting of the being of being' (*Seinsvergessenheit*) in Nietzsche just as it had been in the works of the other Western philosophers who lived before Nietzsche.<sup>7</sup> Heidegger claims that Nietzsche's 'will to power' is a metaphysical principle.<sup>8</sup> However, Walter Kaufmann, together with the majority of the Nietzsche scholars, including myself, disagrees with Heidegger on this point and by implication also with his view that Nietzsche's philosophy is nihilistic at its core.<sup>9</sup> In 'Heidegger, Nietzsche, and the Origins of Nihilism' (1992), Daniel Conway correctly points out that Heidegger's account of the non-naturalistic origin of nihilism leaves no room for getting beyond it by political means; 'by conceiving of nihilism in purely naturalistic terms, Nietzsche salvages the philosophical project of critique and enables us to envision the possibility of change'.<sup>10</sup>

In *Nihilism before Nietzsche* (1995), Michael Gillespie questions the link between the death of god and nihilism, which both I and the majority of Nietzsche readers perceive, by arguing that in medieval nominalism god as reason, order and necessity was being reconceived as absolute will that is free. For Gillespie, Descartes too founded philosophy in an absolute omnipotent will. In my view, what Gillespie fails

to grasp is that Nietzsche suggests that man becomes god himself and that, thus, there is no god independent of the creatively willing overman with his Dionysian joy and affirmation. It cannot be overstated that the aim of some Nietzsche interpreters of founding a new theology is fundamentally *against* the spirit of Nietzsche's intellectual project since he proclaims that the 'man of the future, who will redeem us not only from the hitherto reigning ideal but also from that which was bound to grow out of it, the great nausea, the will to nothingness, nihilism; this bell-stroke of noon and of the great decision that liberates the will again and restores its goal to the earth and his hope to man; this Antichrist and antinihilist; this victor over God and nothingness – *he must come one day*'.<sup>11</sup> In the same vein he states that 'once one said God when one looked upon distant seas; but now I have taught you to say: overman. [...] Away from God and gods [...] [my creative] will has lured me; what could one create if gods existed?'<sup>12</sup> "*Dead are all gods: now we want the overman to live*" (Ref. 12, p. 191). However, I agree with Gillespie that 'in opposition to [...] [the] declining nihilistic will, Nietzsche juxtaposes an ascending will to which he gives the name Dionysos. Dionysos is his great alternative to Christianity and to nihilism.'<sup>13</sup>

In Nietzsche's view, the traditional scientists and philosophical moralists are ultimately unstopably attracted to nihilism. That is why, in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche associates himself with the affirmative, self-loving, joyous, fearless, and sharp-eyed eagle that embraces the future courageously and creatively and which he opposes to the 'hootootoot' of the owl, which sadly and powerlessly laments the lost past: the 'it was' (Ref. 12, p. 400). Consequently, his new post-nihilistic self, the free spirit, wants to become as uninfluenced as possible by the sterile 'virtuous monsters and scarecrows' whose bodies are sick and whose spirit has become weak by the unchecked pursuit of their 'will to truth'.<sup>14</sup>

In section 125 of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche tells us for the first time his famous parable of the madman who announces man's murder of god with the words 'god is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him' (Ref. 14, p. 181). The madman/'der tolle Mensch' (whom Nietzsche identifies in a note with Zarathustra) evaluates god's death as the greatest deed ever because it is the precondition for 'a higher history than all history hitherto'.<sup>15</sup> However, according to Nietzsche, to get out of the 'shadow' of god and to develop a faith and an ethics which is not connected with or justified by god requires a long and troublesome process (Ref. 14, pp. 167–169). Yet due to the inherent self-destructiveness of Christian beliefs, the Christians themselves ironically contribute to this process.

Since, as Nietzsche puts it, there is no 'eternal spider or spider web of reason', that is, no god and no metaphysical reality, his philosophical 'heterodoxy' radically revolutionises and transforms how we think of existence and the self.<sup>16</sup> His *Gay Science* explores an earthly philosophy that uncompromisingly demands we pay heed to the *physis* and its interrelation with the psyche. Since, for Nietzsche, a human spirit without a body that is incessantly becoming is unthinkable, he starts to replace metaphysics, which is concerned with the first and last things, with 'historical philosophizing' which makes use of the methods of the natural sciences, especially psychology, physics, and physiology.<sup>17</sup> The death of the Christian god challenges

men to cope fully with an unordered universe and it also exposes them to the threat of theoretical and practical nihilism. In order to overcome nihilism in science Nietzsche suggests drawing on philosophy for the creation of values and drawing on art in order to create beautiful surfaces that are based on these values.

The creative character of Nietzschean philosophy for dealing with the agony, the misery, the suffering in a godless world is about determining, and legislating systems of values and making and creating conceptual frameworks. In his *Nietzsche* (1983), Richard Schacht also points out the 'value-creating function of philosophy' in Nietzsche.<sup>18</sup> Nietzschean philosophers of the future engage in 'active interpretation and not merely conceptual translation'.<sup>19</sup> For Nietzsche, living is about experimenting playfully with new categories (Ref. 12, p. 278; Ref. 14, p. 347). These new categories are consequential and effective because, for Nietzsche, thinking is doing, which turns eventually into flesh. *The Gay Science* states that the Nietzschean free spirit engages in ongoing 'self-transformation' (Ref. 14, p. 238). Virtues are required in order to see the death of god as an opportunity for the revaluation of all values that can be subsequently incorporated. The virtues that Nietzsche endorses are: honesty, (moral) courage, self-discipline, generosity, politeness, intellectual integrity and cheerfulness.

### The Origin and the Features of European Nihilism

In a note, Nietzsche says that the cause of European nihilism is 'the devaluation of the previous values' (Ref. 16, vol. 12, p. 131). In *Nietzsche: The Man and his Philosophy* (1965), the Nietzsche translator R.J. Hollingdale writes that Nietzsche characterised his own time as being 'nihilistic': 'values and meaning had ceased to make sense, and philosophy was faced with an unexplained universe in a way that had not been so since before Plato'.<sup>20</sup> In other words, as Hollingdale puts it: the Nietzschean 'self-overcoming' of the supernaturally sanctioned Christian morality is just 'this recognition that what has been called moral is, by its own standards, not moral at all' (Ref. 20, p. 140). Nietzsche holds that man needs a new self-justification since the nihilism of his day consists of humankind being 'weary of *man*' (Ref. 11, p. 44). He understands himself as a 'physician' of the sick and decadent culture.<sup>21</sup> He maintains that 'all the values in which mankind now sums up its supreme desiderata are decadence-values' (Ref. 21, p. 572). He explains that life itself is to his mind 'the instinct for growth, for durability, for an accumulation of forces, for *power*: where the will to power is lacking there is decline' (Ref. 21, p. 572). And he adds that 'nihilistic values' are symptomatic of decline.

In the preface 'Attempt at a Self-Criticism' (1886) to *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Nietzsche maintains that 'Christianity was from the beginning, essentially and fundamentally, life's nausea and disgust with life, merely concealed behind, masked by, dressed up as, faith in "another" or "better" life. Hatred of "the world", condemnations of the passions, fear of beauty and sensuality, a beyond invented to better slander this life, at bottom a craving for the nothing, for the end'.<sup>22</sup> In a mature note, Nietzsche understands nihilism in terms of a 'demise of a total

valuation / (namely the moral one), the new interpretive powers are lacking' (Ref. 16, vol. 12, p. 210). This moral nihilism is accompanied by cultural and epistemic nihilism. Christian morality provided value/'Werth', knowledge/'Erkenntnis' and meaning. Nietzsche regards the utter lack of sense/'Sinn' also as a typical trait of European nihilism and, in fact, as 'the danger of dangers' (Ref. 16, vol. 12, p. 110; Ref. 16, vol. 13, p. 214). He states that 'morality was the great *antidote* to practical and theoretical nihilism'.<sup>23</sup> In *The Gay Science* (1882), Nietzsche suggests that we Europeans are in a dilemma situation since our question mark consists of a 'terrifying Either/Or: "Either abolish your references or—*yourselves!*" The latter would be nihilism; but would not the former also be—nihilism?' (Ref. 14, p. 287; Ref. 16, vol. 12, p. 129).

### Pity as the Practice of Nihilism

The greatest danger of Christian morality is that it brings about profound nausea and great pity. Nietzsche says: 'suppose these two were one day to unite, they would inevitably beget one of the uncanniest monsters: the "last will" of man, his will to nothingness, nihilism' (Ref. 11, p. 122). In his book *The Antichrist* (1888), Nietzsche claims that 'pity is the *practice* of nihilism' (Ref. 21, p. 573). He sees pity as 'a prime instrument of the advancement of decadence: pity persuades men to *nothingness!* Of course, one does not say "nothingness" but "beyond" or "God", or "true life", or Nirvana, salvation, blessedness' (Ref. 21, p. 573). Instead of sharing suffering when pitying others Nietzsche advocates sharing joy and all 'the tonic emotions which heighten our vitality'.<sup>24</sup>

Nietzsche criticises Schopenhauer's 'nihilistic' philosophy for making life-negating pity the basis and the source of all virtues (Ref. 21, p. 573). He regards Schopenhauer also as the philosopher of the nihilists because Schopenhauer rejects the will and the desires (Ref. 16, vol. 9, p. 125). Nietzsche opposes Schopenhauer's 'Buddhism for Europeans', his 'nihilism', with his teaching of the 'will to power' and of the related perspectivism of the affects (Ref. 11, p. 19; Ref. 16, vol. 13, p. 214).<sup>25</sup>

He calls Christianity, Buddhism and Brahmanism 'nihilistic religions' because they glorify the contradistinction to life, namely, nothingness, as goal, as the highest good and value (Ref. 16, vol. 13, pp. 229–230). Nietzsche wants us to get beyond the 'nihilistic withdrawal' from existence and 'the desire for nothingness' and to live a worthwhile, guilt-free life full of joy and exuberance (Ref. 11, p. 92). In short, the Nietzschean 'man of the future' is an 'Antichrist and antinihilist' who gained victory over god and the will to nothingness (Ref. 11, p. 96).

### Nihilism is an Intermediate State

I argue that Nietzsche regards nihilism not as an end state, but, rather, only as an intermediate state, an in-between state/'Zwischenzustand' (Ref. 16, vol. 12, p. 351; Ref. 16, vol. 13, p. 210). This in-between period/'Zwischenperiode' of nihilism follows the destruction of the world of being and will be followed by the serene acceptance of the world of incessant becoming as the only world existing (Ref. 16, vol. 12, p. 365).

Nietzschean artist-philosophers transfigure the state of nihilism by using the actively creative will to power for actions that affirm life and enhance the future.

According to Nietzsche, nihilism is 'the radical repudiation of value, meaning, and desirability' (Ref. 19, p. 7; Ref. 16, vol. 12, p. 125). He rejects the nihilistic 'rebound from "God is truth" to the fanatical faith "All is false" [...] [and] "Everything lacks meaning"' (Ref. 19, p. 7; Ref. 16, vol. 12, p. 125). Instead, he argues that all forms of human knowledge are perspectival. In *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), Nietzsche says in defence of perspectivism that some philosophers 'prefer even a certain nothing to an uncertain something to lie down on—and die. But this is nihilism and the sign of a despairing, mortally weary soul' (Ref. 25, p. 16). He claims that the 'will to truth' roots in the powerlessness or impotence of the will to create. (Ref. 19, vol. 12, p. 365). For him, the positing or willing of values is the cardinal task of the philosopher who is confronted with profound existential insecurity that is brought about by the crisis of reason and morality and the related threat of nihilism. In Nietzsche's view, the merit of Kant's theoretical philosophy with its irresolvable antinomies is that it contributed to the self-consciousness of nihilism.<sup>26</sup>

In *Friedrich Nietzsches Philosophie des Europäischen Nihilismus* (1992) Elisabeth Kuhn shows that just as Nietzsche regards all of his 'truths' as provisional and revisable, he also considers his exegesis of European nihilism as open to discussion (Ref. 26, pp. 71–79, 99, 115–117). In *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (1950), Walter Kaufmann states that 'Nietzsche believed that, to overcome nihilism, we must first of all recognize it' (Ref. 9, p. 110). I suggest that Nietzsche regards creating this awareness of the existence of the problem of nihilism as a significant part of his philosophical task. He considers the state of 'absolute worthlessness' in European nihilism as the necessary consequence of the ideals and valuations we have upheld hitherto (Ref. 16, vol. 12, pp. 339, 109–110). He judges nihilism as a 'necessary' intellectual-historical development, which is at once an utterly dangerous and a welcome 'guest' (Ref. 19, p. 4; Ref. 16, vol. 12, p. 125). This means that, according to him, we must pass through nihilism.

Nietzsche admits to having been hitherto 'a thorough-going nihilist' (Ref. 19, p. 18). Yet he regards nihilism not as an end but as a transitory phase, which functions as a means of selection of those who have the strength to posit a goal that allows pursuing 'the great passion' (Ref. 19, p. 19). In *Human, All Too Human*, the early Nietzsche already points out 'the ultimate goallessness of man' (Ref. 17, p. 29). A new self with a new goal is what is being needed. Nietzschean overmen are 'Good Europeans' (Ref. 14, p. 340). Nietzsche calls himself in a letter an 'incorrigible European and anti-antisemite'.<sup>27</sup> Post-nihilistic Nietzschean selves have the will to learn to live joyously with uncertainty, ambiguity and multiplicity.

Nietzsche argues that the Christian-moral exegesis of the world caused nihilism (Ref. 16, vol. 12, p. 125). Nihilism means that 'the highest values devalue themselves' (Ref. 19, p. 9; Ref. 16, vol. 12, pp. 350–352). The demise of morality also generates nihilistic disorientation in the natural sciences, the humanities, in politics and economics (Ref. 19, pp. 44–47; Ref. 16, vol. 12, pp. 129–131, 125–127). Tracy Strong correctly states 'and if, as Nietzsche contends, the modern will is nihilistic,



then modern politics (by which any world is established and maintained), is itself all the more nihilistic'.<sup>28</sup> Nietzsche does not want to 'sacrifice God for the nothing' (Ref. 25, p. 67). Rather, in his opinion, art needs to take over the role which formerly god had, namely, to generate active energetic creations.

### Forms of Nihilism

Nietzsche mostly uses the French term '*décadence*' when he is depicting decadence. Claiming that nihilism is the 'logic of decadence' and not its cause, he understands *décadence* as a physiological-psychological process of corruption, decline and decay, which is marked by the inability to create a whole (Ref. 16, vol. 13, p. 265). The 'will to power' of decadent individuals is weakened. This results in a failure to integrate their instincts with the outside stimuli and in this way to bring about a whole. The loss of absolute truth gave rise to Schopenhauer's pessimist philosophy. Yet Nietzsche understands pessimism as 'a preliminary form' of nihilism (Ref. 19, p. 11, Ref. 16, vol. 12, pp. 125–126, 129). There is theoretical and practical nihilism since it is possible to not only negate in thought, but also to do deeds of negation. (Ref. 16, vol. 12, p. 129).

Nietzsche discerns six forms of nihilism in his incomplete and unpolished notes: incomplete, complete, passive, active, radical and extreme nihilism. He seeks to contribute to turning the predominant form of 'incomplete nihilism' into 'complete nihilism', which is a 'necessary consequence of ideals hitherto', in order to subsequently go beyond nihilism altogether (Ref. 16, vol. 12, p. 476). Active nihilism is 'a sign of enhanced spiritual power' and it is the opposite of passive nihilism. Whilst in the case of active nihilists, nihilism provides them with an opportunity to posit a new faith and to create new existential conditions, which are fostering an improved future, in the case of passive nihilists, nihilism makes them weak and suicidal because they lack the strength to establish new valuations and new goals and to live according to them (Ref. 16, vol. 12, p. 350). The active nihilist destroys in order to replace the destroyed with something new and better. Unlike the passive nihilist who harbours resentments against the strong, he is never destructive for the sake of being destructive (Ref. 16, vol. 12, p. 365). In Nietzsche's view, Buddhism is perfected passive nihilism because it is neither constructive nor destructive.

'Radical nihilism' maintains the 'absolute untenability of existence' once metaphysical explanations are being ruled out. It is 'a result of the belief in morality' insofar as morality generated 'truthfulness' which destroyed it (Ref. 16, vol. 12, p. 571). 'Extreme nihilism' attempts to avoid the paradox of 'in so far as we believe in morality, we *condemn* existence' by regarding life as being '*absolute and eternal*' (Ref. 16, vol. 13, p. 71). Extreme nihilism refers to the rejection of truth and of the thing-in-itself (Ref. 16, vol. 12, pp. 351–352). Nietzsche explains that 'the most extreme form of nihilism would be the view that *every* belief, every considering-something-true, is necessarily false because there simply is no *true world*. Thus: a *perspectival appearance* whose origin lies in us' (Ref. 19, pp. 14–15, Ref. 16, vol. 12, p. 354). In *Twilight of the Idols* (1888) Nietzsche details 'how the "true world" finally became a fable': from Plato, to Christianity, to Kant, to Positivism the belief in

absolute truth became increasingly unconvincing.<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche does also away with the 'apparent world' because it is a 'moral-optical illusion', a fiction invented in contradistinction to the metaphysical world (Ref. 29, p. 484).

In Nietzsche's account, the nihilistic phase will be superseded by the Dionysian 'tragic age' during which Nietzschean overmen create beautiful surfaces in order to cope with the terrible, nonsensical and chaotic nature of existence (Ref. 16, vol. 12, p. 202, Ref. 29, p. 486). Nietzsche is replacing metaphysics and religion with art and with his teaching of the 'eternal return' of the same. The latter has the function to be a means of 'breeding' and 'selection' (Ref. 16, vol. 12, pp. 342–343). Nietzschean 'breeding' relates neither to a version of Darwinism nor to biological race. Rather it denotes education, moral and spiritual formation, and mental discipline of the exceptional individuals who will eventually embody the resulting new force structures (Ref. 14, p. 130, Ref. 16, vol. 12, p. 339). 'Breeding' channels and transfigures the instinctual forces into the desired direction of cultural amelioration.

According to Keith Ansell-Pearson, the editor of *A Companion to Nietzsche* (2006), *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887) is 'one of the key texts of European intellectual modernity'.<sup>30</sup> In this polemic book Nietzsche criticises the adherents of the ascetic ideal such as Schopenhauer by arguing that the human will 'will rather will *nothingness* than *not* will' (Ref. 11, pp. 97, 162). This means that since to the ascetic's will it is denied to desire life and creation it desires death and destruction. Nietzsche states 'this hatred of the human, and even more of the animal, and more still of the material, this horror of the senses, of reason itself, this fear of happiness and beauty, this longing to get away from all appearance, change, becoming, death, wishing, from longing itself—all this means—let us dare to grasp it—a *will to nothingness*' (Ref. 11, p. 162).

Nihilism can be overcome by way of positing a goal for man. This creative positing of a purpose also makes human suffering meaningful again. Nietzsche writes on the meaning of the ascetic ideal 'that something was *lacking*, that man was surrounded by a fearful *void*—he did not know how to justify, to account for, to affirm himself; he *suffered* from the problem of his meaning' (Ref. 11, p. 162). Since, according to Nietzsche, for humans any meaning is better than none, nothingness itself becomes the provider of meaning. Without an interpretation man is, as Nietzsche puts it, 'like a leaf in the wind, a plaything of nonsense—the "sense-less"' (Ref. 11, p. 162). Nietzsche judges nihilism to be 'one of the greatest *crises*, a moment of the *deepest* self-reflection of humanity' (Ref. 16, vol. 13, p. 56). Yet as a philosopher of culture he wants us to see in the crisis of nihilism the potential for change and to build up the strength to put this insight into practice.<sup>31</sup> For Nietzsche the measure of strength is 'to be able to live under *inverse* valuations and to want them eternally again' (Ref. 16, vol. 12, p. 339).

In *Nihilism Now! Monsters of Energy* (2000) various philosophers explore how to live in nihilistic times joyfully and productively in a Nietzschean manner. Their contributions have as their point of departure Nietzsche's idea that this world is a 'monster of energy, without beginning or end'.<sup>32</sup> This is complemented by the view that the Nietzschean philosopher of the future is a 'monster of energy' (Ref. 16, vol. 11, p. 260).



Yet as much sympathy as I have for Nietzsche's philosophy, I find it alienating that the Nietzschean overman is gendered: he is a male man (Ref. 24, p. 29). This problematic privileging of masculinity shows in Nietzsche, for instance, when he asks rhetorically in a note: 'do I want to create lamb souls and enthusiastic little virgins? I want lions and monsters of power and love'.<sup>33</sup> Further evidence for Nietzsche's androcentrism we find in a late note, in which he states that, in contrast to (higher) men, women strengthen and co-operate with moribund decadent forces.<sup>34</sup>

On 10 June 1887 in Lenzer Heide in Switzerland, Nietzsche wrote in his notebook a section entitled 'The European Nihilism' (Ref. 16, vol. 12, pp. 211–217). There he explains that morality is self-destructive; it generated truthfulness/'Wahrhaftigkeit', which revealed morality's teleological character and its all-too-human motivations in its genealogy (Ref. 23, pp. 116–117, Ref. 16, vol. 12, p. 211). This is what brought about the dissolution process of nihilism. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche says that truthfulness questions its own will to truth: 'after Christian truthfulness has drawn one inference after another, it must end by drawing its *most striking inference*, its inference *against* itself; this will happen, however, when it poses the question "*what is the meaning of all will to truth?*"' (Ref. 11, p. 161).

In a late note Nietzsche writes that: 'a nihilist is a man who judges the world as it is that it ought *not* be, and of the world as it ought to be that it does not exist. According to this view, our existence (acting, suffering, willing, feeling) has no meaning: the pathos of the 'in vain' is the nihilists' pathos' (Ref. 16, vol. 12, p. 366). However, Nietzsche is not thinking that everything is in vain after the Christian moral interpretation has become untenable. Quite to the contrary, he wants us to embark onto new 'seas' of knowledge and to create new 'suns' of valuations.<sup>35</sup> In my opinion, Nietzsche offers a feasible way out of nihilism by creating the conditions for new possibilities to emerge for the interpretation or 'exegesis' of us and the world. Gillespie and Strong also write that Nietzsche 'not merely proclaims the advent of nihilism but presents us with a new way of thinking that he believes opens up a new, unexplored space for life beyond nihilism' (Ref. 35, p. 9).

Nietzschean philosophers, that is, philosophers as Nietzsche has them in mind, desire 'the eternal joy of creating' in order to prevail over nihilistic propensities and in order to think of new possibilities of (moral) interpretations of the world (Ref. 29, p. 562). For these interpretations new concepts are needed. One such concept is 'the word "overman" as the designation of a type of supreme achievement, as opposed to "modern" men, to "good" men, to Christians and other nihilists'.<sup>36</sup> Nietzsche also expresses his Dionysian, life-affirming moods in his writing style; in his works he uses passionate language for creating new concepts, feelings, and experiences (Ref. 16, vol. 11, pp. 486–487, Ref. 36, p. 261). He emphasises the constitutive role of performative speech in conceptual creativity. I agree with Allison that apart from Nietzsche it is very difficult to find another Western thinker 'whose distinctive style of expression so forcefully reflects the content of his concerns'.<sup>37</sup> Nietzsche intends to advance the beautification of life both on the stylistic and on the contents' level. Burch argues that Nietzsche considers them to be inseparable. For her, for instance, the cheerful tone is an intrinsic part of his philosophy (Ref. 24, pp. 321–322, 286, 204–205).

### Conclusion: Responsibility in Nietzsche

Due to the existence of epistemic nihilism, 'a simplification for the purpose of life' is needed (Ref. 16, vol. 12, pp. 351–352). Philosophers, as Nietzsche understands them, bestow value on a reality that has no value in itself; they create a perspectival semblance. Nietzsche also regards science as a cultural system that rests on contingent grounds. Therefore, his work is concerned with the responsible construction of the narratives of science in such a way that they enhance agency and promote a life-affirming future. For him, these new narratives also need to make clear that there are 'infinite modes of possibilities of being-different' (Ref. 16, vol. 12, p. 355).

Philosophers, as conceived by Nietzsche, incorporate responsibility to such an extent that it becomes their 'conscience' (Ref. 11, p. 60). He comments that 'the proud awareness of the extraordinary privilege of *responsibility*, the consciousness of this rare freedom, this power over oneself and over fate, has in this case penetrated to the profoundest depths and become instinct, the dominating instinct' (Ref. 11, p. 60). An important characteristic of a philosopher, as Nietzsche comprehends him, is his 'will to responsibility' (Ref. 11, p. 116; Ref. 25, p. 137). Indeed, he 'instinctively' seeks 'heavy responsibilities' (Ref. 19, p. 498; Ref. 16, vol. 13, p. 475; Ref. 16, vol. 10, p. 140). One such responsibility is to create the values and the concepts that are needed in order to overcome the intermediate state of nihilism. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he writes that 'in man *creature* and *creator* are united' (Ref. 25, p. 154). Thereby, the crux is that man gives himself a goal, a meaning and a sense and is not expecting to receive justification from an external source of authority such as god, reason, society or history (Ref. 16, vol. 12, p. 355). For instance, in a late note with the title 'critique of nihilism' Nietzsche shows this when he writes that the nihilistic 'feeling of *worthlessness* resulted from grasping that neither with the concept of "*purpose*", nor with the concept "*unity*", nor with the concept "*truth*" it is permissible to interpret the total character of existence' (Ref. 16, vol. 13, pp. 46–49; Ref. 23, p. 219).

Nietzsche understands freedom as 'the will to assume responsibility for oneself' (Ref. 29, p. 542). In 'Nietzsche's Fatalism' Robert Solomon claims that "'responsibility for self" [is] at the very heart of his philosophical mission'.<sup>38</sup> In *Die Entgrenzung der Verantwortung: Nietzsche, Dostojewskij, Levinas* (2008), Silvio Pfeuffer discusses the individual's unbounded (*unbegrenzt*) responsibility in Nietzsche. The strong individual gives away out of generosity, because it is over-rich. The sovereign individual's will to power seeks to preserve and strengthen the otherness of the other because it wants to assert (*durchsetzen*) and expand (*erweitern*) itself when confronted with multiplicity.<sup>39</sup> The Nietzschean free spirit's problematisations (often supported by the use of sarcastic irony and provocative laughter) of that which his contemporaries take for granted also estranges others from their received beliefs and prepares them to become experimentalists in the sense of Nietzsche themselves (Ref. 25, p. 138, 37; Ref. 12, p. 291). However, the free spirit is first and foremost a poetical man/'*homo poeta*' who *creates* a new morality for a new humanity (Ref. 14, p. 197). The free spirit is, as *The Gay Science* states, 'an artist in love' who makes his intoxication, his 'passion and fantasies', serviceable for knowledge. These 'fantasies

and debaucheries of thought' allow the free spirit to conceive a truly alternative culture (Ref. 14, p. 121, 130). The free spirit has the strength to experiment with instabilities, contingencies, and 'madness': with that which goes beyond the 'knowledge' of the cultural establishment (Ref. 14, p. 13). From the free spirit to the 'overman'/'Übermensch', which Nietzsche presents to us for the first time in part one of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883), there are first a bundle of qualitative leaps or 'overcomings' to take (Ref. 12, p. 128). In other words, the free spirit is a kind of forerunner and harbinger of the overman.

The overman knows that the most extreme form of nihilism is: 'nothingness ("meaninglessness and senselessness") eternally!' (Ref. 23, p. 118; Ref. 16, vol. 12, p. 213). One of Nietzsche's aims is to restore the 'innocence of becoming' and change in order to make it possible to go beyond nihilism. He claims that 'the concept of "God" was until now the greatest objection to existence. We deny God, we deny the responsibility in God: only thereby do we redeem the world' (Ref. 29, p. 501). In a late note, Nietzsche states that 'such an experimental philosophy as I live anticipates experimentally even the possibilities of the most fundamental nihilism; but this does not mean that it must halt at a negation, a No, a will to negation. It wants rather to cross over to the opposite of this—to a Dionysian affirmation of the world as it is' (Ref. 19, p. 536; Ref. 16, vol. 13, p. 492).

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31. 'jede Art Pessimismus und Nihilismus [wird] in der Hand des Stärksten nur ein Hammer und Werkzeug mehr [...], mit dem man sich ein neues Paar Flügel zusetzt' (F. Nietzsche, *Unpublished Notes*, 12, p. 111). See A. Sommer (2006) Nihilism and skepticism in Nietzsche (*A Companion to Nietzsche*, K. Ansell-Pearson, ed., Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 250–270), p. 253.
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33. 'Will ich denn Lammseelen und schwärmerische Jungfräulein schaffen? Löwen will ich und Ungeheuer an Kraft und Liebe' (Nietzsche, *Unpublished Notes*, 11, p. 202).
34. 'woman! One-half of mankind is weak, typically sick, changeable, inconstant—woman needs strength in order to cleave to it; she needs a religion of weakness that glorifies being weak, loving, and being humble as divine: or better, she makes the strong weak—she rules when she succeeds in overcoming the strong. Woman has always conspired with the types of decadence, the priests, against the 'powerful', the 'strong', the men—.' (F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, p. 460, F. Nietzsche, *Unpublished Notes*, 13, p. 366).
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